



St. Michael's
HEALTH GROUP

Cultural Differences in the Workplace

FINAL REPORT

**Report written by: Jo Heggerud, RN, BScN.
Educator, St. Michael's Health Group
March 10, 2010**



INTRODUCTION

St. Michael's Health Group was successful in receiving a grant through the Human Rights Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund in February 2009 to address cultural diversity and teambuilding in the workplace. Embracing and promoting cultural diversity in our workforce, an important element in our Strategic Plan enabled us to celebrate our diversity, and begin to break down potential barriers within the workforce.

St. Michael's has over 42 different countries represented, with staff speaking more than 23 different languages (see Appendix #1 for Cultural Breakdown of St. Michael's employees). With this diversity, there is potential for lack of understanding and differences between cultures. In order to attempt to address these issues, the Cultural Differences Project was initiated.

The Cultural Differences in the Workplace Project has been deemed a huge success within St. Michael's. With involving the staff from the announcement of receiving the grant, through to the surveys, focus groups, education, post survey, and final wrap up, positive comments and remarks have indicated the project has not only been successful, but that we look forward to taking the information learned and moving forward with our new knowledge and enthusiasm.

Process

The grant was received in February 2009 and St. Michael's Educator, Jo Heggerud, undertook leadership of the project. Initial planning took place in the months of February and March 2009 to determine the outline for the project. A literature search was completed within this timeframe (see Appendix #2), and initial meetings were held with potential contract agencies.

April 2009 goals, set and completed, included selecting to work with Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations (NAARR), in conjunction with Powerful Play Experiences to provide training for our employees. References were obtained prior to selecting NAARR to ensure quality of services would be provided.

Bulletin # 1 was posted for staff to make them aware and inclusive of the project. A general outline of the plan included two 3-hour training sessions for each staff member.

Cultural Differences in the Workplace PROJECT

May 2009 goals included sending notices to the employees and St. Michael's Leadership Group regarding focus groups. The goals of the focus groups were to determine pertinent issues that staff were facing related to cultural differences in the workplace.

Bulletin # 2 was posted for staff at this time, explaining the focus groups and asking for participation. Five focus groups were conducted during this month, including one session for the Leadership Group. Results were compiled and shared with NAARR.

During the month of June 2009, pre-surveys were distributed to all employees. Results were returned and compiled by the end of June. These results were shared with NAARR for further direction. Bulletin # 3 was posted.

July 2009 goals included the planning sessions with Ricardo Carlos from NAARR and Robert Manolson with Powerful Play Experiences. Dates were set for five Cultural Differences sessions and five Teambuilding sessions, including one full-day session for the Leadership Team. Format of the sessions was reviewed and discussed. Invitations were sent to selected delegates from the Leadership Group to attend the September 2, 2009 session.

August 2009 goals included informing all staff of the format for training sessions. A letter was sent to the Leadership Team and Bulletin # 4 was posted for staff. Sign up sheets were posted for nursing staff, and managers were asked to enroll employees for sessions.

The initial training session was completed on September 2, 2009 with the delegates from the Leadership Group. Sessions were very well-received and evaluations from the sessions were compiled (See Appendix # 3). A group debriefing session was held with involved staff, and suggestions were presented to facilitators to improve education sessions for staff. The overall evaluation score for the Leadership Team Cultural Differences session was 4.1 out of 5, and for the Teambuilding - 3.8 out of 5.

The Cultural Differences in the Workplace session for the Leadership Group consisted of interactive sessions that encouraged group participation, discussion and interaction. Topics addressed included our expectations, diversity within the room, and values of the group. Topics included: migration push and pull factors, categories of newcomers, trends in who is immigrating and stats related to same, definitions of newcomers, and case studies involving the same definitions. The sessions also included a definition of culture, discussion around the Canadian culture and the Iceberg model(a tool to help

Cultural Differences in the Workplace PROJECT

identify deeper cultural issues) - Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions at Work, pros and cons of diversity, differences in the workplace, and the Canadian Food Sandwich (communication tool). Intercultural communication, stereotypes, active listening skills and two more tools were discussed, the D.I.E.T tool, and the Triangle Tool.

Following the leadership sessions, a meeting was held to debrief and discuss how these changes could be brought forward to work more effectively for the employees. Suggestions such as making the teambuilding a little less personal, excluding the Hofstede's model, and using larger groups for the teambuilding were brought forward to Ricardo and Robert for the subsequent sessions.

The Cultural Differences and Teambuilding sessions for all employees were completed throughout the months of September and October 2009. Each staff member attended both sessions, which were each 3 hours in duration. A total of 155 employees completed the Cultural Differences session, including participants from our Long Term Care Facility as well as our 3 Supportive Living sites in Vegreville, Spruce Grove, and Millennium Pavilion.

Materials covered in the Cultural Differences session included Migration Factors, Stats for current immigration, definition of culture, 3 tools to address various angles of cultural diversity, excerpts from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, benefits and challenges of diversity, intercultural communication, stereotypes, and case studies to address these points.

Teambuilding focused on team success values through play. Through discussing barriers to effective teamwork, team success values were identified. These values were used as the basis for teambuilding and discussions. Groups were asked to select a few values that were most important to them and then come up with some ways in which they could incorporate these values into their everyday work. Groups were energized and worked as teams to come up with some insightful ideas to present to the large group. These values and actions were then shared on a large banner by all staff writing down one action that they could implement to carry forward the team values. Through energy, excitement, and play, the foundation for team success was laid in these sessions. A total of 124 employees attended the Teambuilding sessions.

Following the completion of these education sessions, a 'post survey' was distributed to all staff to complete. 24 surveys were returned with very positive comments. Comments from this included:

Cultural Differences in the Workplace PROJECT

- “Absolutely the sessions met my expectations, they were fun!”
- “I got to meet more staff members and learn about cultures and teambuilding.”
- “Great fun and insights put in a good way... good job.”
- “Yes, it was helpful in that it went over all the concepts that were important for people to appreciate differing cultures.”

Positive feedback was received from both sessions. The overall rating for the Cultural Differences session was 4.5 out of 5 and for the Teambuilding - 4.6 out of 5

As a final wrap up for this project, a celebration was held, with the Teambuilding Banner on display to remind staff of their commitment to teamwork within St. Michael's. The celebration included a potluck, with approximately 50 staff bringing in ethnic dishes, dressing in their native attire and sharing their talents of song and dance. The event far exceeded our expectations. It was a fantastic ending to the project, and as a part of the event, we incorporated an official kick off of 'Wellness Works' our newly designed wellness program for St. Michael's.

Goals and Objectives

As set out from the start of the project, the goals and objectives were as follows:

- Remove or reduce cultural barriers in the workplace
- Increase sensitivity to cultural differences
- Increase effective communication and inter-relations between culturally diverse groups within the workplace.
- Provide effective team building skills and enhance the ability of culturally diverse groups to work effectively together towards common organizational goals and team objectives.
- Develop a report/program which outlines which information presented was useful in beginning to change the culture of the working environment.

We were successful in reaching the goals outlined above. Although it is difficult to remove cultural barriers in the workplace in such a short period, there is definitely an increased awareness of sensitivity of cultural differences. With this increased sensitivity comes the issue of how to begin to address these differences. The first step is knowing there *are* differences; then we can begin to effectively work towards resolving the differences.

Tools were provided to increase effective communication during the workshops. It is our hope that we can refresh these ideas throughout the year on an ongoing basis.

Effective teambuilding experiences were provided during the Teambuilding workshops. Staff were asked to pledge something they could do to work towards this goal and wrote their pledge on a banner which is displayed in the staff room. Having this common goal provides a sense of team and community within the organization. There is definitely an increased sense of teamwork within the facility.

Differences from Originally Planned Project

The only difference from the planned project to the actual project was the organizations we selected to work with. We initially proposed to work with Catholic Social Services to do the cultural component, and with Naslund Consulting to do the teambuilding portion. In meeting with different agencies, it was decided that Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations would be better able to meet our needs. Partially due to a cost difference, Powerful Play Experiences was contracted through NAARR for the teambuilding portion.

Suggestions for Further Improvement

In regard to how the project was planned and carried out, we are very satisfied with the results. It was important to keep the employees aware of the project, what it entailed, the process, and the progression of the project. With getting 'buy in' from the employees, it was beneficial to both the employees and the employer in getting full satisfaction and needs met for the project.

Because our staff at St. Michael's work different shifts, scheduling employees to attend both of the sessions was difficult. Attendance was good for the sessions, but could have been improved. This is something that would need to be addressed in more detail for further improvement.

As far as the sessions themselves, the cultural differences sessions were very well received. There was good participation, and staff were pleased with the sessions they attended. The teambuilding session was received very well, the content was delivered well and was appropriate, the enthusiasm was high, and the outcomes positive for the facility.

Outcome Results

As set out in the project proposal, a Power Point presentation on Cultural Differences in the Workplace was completed with the assistance of NAARR (see Appendix #4). This presentation will be adapted as needed throughout the year and presented as a part of the General Orientation for all new staff, as well as periodically throughout the year.

The Teambuilding portion is also being carried forward in various forms. Through educational activities this will continue to be addressed; as well this has taken shape through the Wellness Program at work that was recently developed.

Although it is difficult to directly assess changed attitudes, there is a sense of team felt among the staff. Comments are often heard in the hallways about what may be going on in a certain situation. Employees are more willing to talk about issues and approach one another in certain situations. Praise and thank you's are often heard throughout the hallways as well.

Plans are underway to share the Power Point presentation with the Regional Educators Group. This will hopefully allow other facilities to become aware of the differences shared at St. Michael's, how we dealt with them, and how they can perhaps begin to address issues their facilities are facing.

In order for NAARR to assist St. Michael's in carrying forward the project, a Train the Trainer course was attended by Jo Heggerud, Educator, to assist in becoming a cultural 'champion' at St. Michael's. This will allow further training to occur at the facility, as well as to have a resource person in the facility with whom issues can be addressed.

As a follow up with the project, 'Wellness Works' was initiated On November 26, 2009, at the Cultural Diversity Wrap-Up Celebration, announcing a new program for all St. Michael's staff...

Wellness Works; Healthy People – Healthy Work

Wellness can mean many things so here at St. Michael's so we have developed a program that addresses all the levels of health. Our Wellness Works program will look at the following areas of health for our employees:

- Physical Health - supporting health conditions ie: diabetes, nutrition, ergonomics, exercise, smoking cessation

Cultural Differences in the Workplace PROJECT

- Cultural Health - acknowledging and respecting cultural differences/similarities within the work environment
- Organizational Health - team identity/working together, kindness to others, positive attitude, interdisciplinary activities, going above and beyond
- Personal Health - self/mind health, mental health, work/life balance, stress management, self care, EAP

Over the next year, we will be providing information and holding events that target various areas of health for our employees with the goal of making St. Michael's a happier, healthier place to work.

Sharing Results

As the success of the project depended largely on the involvement of the employees from the initial phase, the results of the project are available to the employees. The information collected from the project will be carried forward and used in the future to share with new employees, as well as to continue to address current issues that employees are facing regarding cultural issues. A copy of the final report will be available to staff to review at their leisure; copies will be made available for the Board of Directors, and other interested parties at their request. A summary of the project will be available on the SMECCS website, www.smhg.ca.

Comments from Workshops

Some of the comments from the workshop participants included:

- “Got the staff involved together and will build a stronger and effective company”
- “Very effective - to isolate specific values to work on”- re: teambuilding
- “I think it helped people realize where they were lacking and where they could improve when dealing with others”
- “Improve staff morale, improve resident care”
- “(workshops) were fun! I got to meet more staff members and learn about cultures and teambuilding”
- “Yes, I did not know what to expect. Great fun and insights put in a good way, GOOD JOB”
- “Yes, it brings issues that people tend to overlook into awareness and reminds people why they need to think before they say anything”
- “Would like more of the same to be organized on a regular basis in the future”.

SUMMARY

The project was deemed a huge success for all who were involved. We are looking forward to taking our new knowledge, sharing it with others, and keeping our spirits and enthusiasm high with the teamwork that was developed. Continuing to address and enhance the subject of cultural diversity within St. Michael's will remain an important part of programming as we continue to strive towards exceeding our goals set out in our Strategic Plan.

Thank you to Alberta Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund for granting us the funding so that we could undertake the Cultural Differences in the Workplace Project. The project allowed St. Michael's to celebrate its diversity, learn about different cultures and traditions, and provide tools and techniques to strive towards a more culturally diverse workforce. By enabling us with the tools to continue to work towards a cohesive work environment, St. Michael's will not only work better internally as a team, but reflect its values into the community.

Photos



Cultural Differences in the Workplace PROJECT



Cultural Differences in the Workplace PROJECT

